

2012

Strategic Economic Plan for Greenville, North Carolina: A Roadmap to Community Prosperity



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In recent decades, Greenville became a regional hub of commerce, education, and health services. At times, the city's development footprint grew even faster than its infrastructure and its economic fundamentals. Now, a new generation of business, community, and institutional leaders is reinvesting in Greenville's economic fundamentals and ushering the city into its next phase of growth: *Greenville will become a top-tier southern university-medical (uni-med) marketplace that serves the eastern North Carolina region.*

The uni-med marketplace is where the public university, the public-private medical sphere, and private commerce intersect – a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurialism, and creativity, as well as health and information sciences, and technological experimentation, all supported by thriving sectors in finance, insurance, real estate (F.I.R.E.), retail, engineering, and construction.

Greenville's next phase of growth will build-on the community's longstanding assets while preserving its core values, but it will also be guided by forward-looking economic strategies designed to enhance Greenville's competitiveness in the changing global economy. Greenville will become a top-tier southern uni-med marketplace in part by realizing the following vision elements:

A top-tier southern uni-med community, Greenville is . . .

- **Serving the eastern region:** Greenville provides specialized, high-value-added services and resources to people at all income levels throughout the eastern North Carolina region; Greenville is a regional center for broad-based, community-wide economic empowerment.
- **A community of innovation:** eastern North Carolina's heritage of pragmatic innovation in agriculture and industry made Greenville a thriving business community; the rise of ECU as a research institution, and the growth of the Vidant Health campus, will bolster all levels of community innovation – from grassroots entrepreneurialism and business innovation to applied/medical research and academic scholarship.
- **Where barbecue meets bistro:** Greenville is a diverse community with a diversifying marketplace in which modern southern flair is intermingling with other regional and international flavors; Greenville is becoming increasingly more cosmopolitan and eclectic while still preserving its down-to-earth sensibility and inviting atmosphere.
- **A health-enhancement community:** Greenville is becoming a model community for integrating sports and recreation for all ages, community parks and greenways, holistic medical services, health education, and community and family resources.
- **A destination community:** Greenville is a place where businesses thrive because families do; but it's also a great place in which to cultivate a career; investments in infrastructure, quality-of-life, and cultural and entertainment venues will attract new talent and additional visitors, ensure that economic opportunities keep pace with the community's wealth of training and higher-educational resources, and encourage young adults to stay in Greenville to harvest the rewards.

The preceding vision elements represent aspects of regional economy that the community can more actively shape via policy, public investments, and economic development (ED) plans, programs and projects. Many economic variables are beyond the control of governments and institutions; yet economic development strategies that promote the above vision elements will put Greenville in a better position to capitalize on its opportunities, rather than being at mercy of larger outside forces.

In the past, Greenville evolved from a thriving tobacco town into a regional hub as a result of farsighted actions by local and State leaders, entrepreneurs and business innovators, educators, and other people who capitalized on Greenville's many "natural" advantages, which included:

- A favorable climate and geographical alignment
- U.S. migration patterns
- Attractive regional business conditions: inexpensive land, amenable labor laws and economic regulations, emerging skilled workforce
- State of N.C. policies that recognized Greenville's importance to eastern N.C., such as when the legislature expanded the mission of ECU (as a major university) and when it located medical and dental schools in Greenville

Going forward, some of Greenville's past advantages will become less important, while other factors will become more important to Greenville's economy. Having a clear, compelling economic vision – a distinctive community identity – helps to focus community resources on priorities and strategies that will have the greatest positive impacts.

Recommended Strategic Goals: 2012 – 2015

Greenville has identified 13 strategic economic goals (next page), which it will pursue with its economic development partners over the next three years. To maximize its resources, Greenville must simultaneously approach its economic challenges at two levels.

- **Immediate responses to economic trends:** Greenville's first seven strategic goals are designed to create jobs for its growing population and generate additional revenue for City services and infrastructure investment; the positive impacts from these strategies and higher-priority action items will be felt as early as within the next few years.
- **Intermediate economic development strategies:** at the same time, Greenville must also invest in its future success; the other six strategic goals will prepare Greenville to capitalize on its distinctive advantages, or success factors, which will make the city more competitive and attractive in the mid to long-term future.

Advancing both levels of strategic goals (immediate and intermediate) will address urgent needs while helping Greenville to realize its vision of becoming a top-tier southern uni-med marketplace.

Strategic Goals: 2012 – 2015*

Regain Jobs and Increase City Revenue

- #1 Attract and retain jobs by reaching out to companies in targeted economic sectors; complement the efforts of Greenville's economic development partners by focusing on business operations that wish to locate in close proximity to a university or medical campus, at a downtown location, or along a major commercial corridor.
- #2 Develop retail to full potential, maximizing revenue impact and neighborhood vitality.
- #3 Nurture the success of local entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- #4 Increase Greenville's profile in regional and state forums, emphasizing that Greenville serves the eastern North Carolina region and is a rising uni-med community.
- #5 Diversify the City's tax base and revenue sources to increase the City's General Revenue.
- #6 Promote Greenville's proven track record as a business-friendly community; demonstrate how Greenville's streamlined, consistent, predictable development review process reduces business costs.
- #7 Support the Pitt County Development Commission and other economic development partners in promoting manufacturing, biotech, gaming, military support, and other "heavier" industries.

Invest for Future Success

- #8 Make transportation gateways and commercial corridors more attractive, legible, and accessible.
- #9 Develop sports, recreational, arts, cultural, and entertainment offerings.
- #10 Position Center City as the vibrant epicenter of Greenville's uni-med community; encourage mixed-use redevelopment including residential and major "anchor" projects that reinforce the identities of downtown districts and adjacent neighborhoods.
- #11 Support and promote the community's existing resources for developing human capital: training; primary, secondary and technical education; career and small business support services.
- #12 Build 21st century infrastructure that serves industry needs, attracts active and creative professionals, and improves mobility and accessibility for all Greenville citizens.
- #13 Foster a proactive culture within the City government that anticipates needs and trends, cultivates new ideas, pursues innovations, and constantly seeks new ways to promote the City's strategic and long-range goals.

***The above strategic goals are not listed in order of ranking**

Implementing the Strategy

Greenville will successfully implement its strategic goals through the active involvement of City government, including elected officials, administration leaders, and employees from many departments. Partners from business, education, labor, and the community have equally important roles to play.

Implementing the strategy will involve four main tracks:

- *Set Priorities for First Two Years* – the City Council has begun to identify the highest-priority strategic goals, and the highest-priority Actions within each of the 13 strategic goals, that should be pursued in the next two years (from 2012 to June 2014).
- *"Connect the Dots" Across the City Organization* - the Economic Development Division and the City Manager's Office will lead efforts to communicate the City's economic strategy throughout the City organization, so that every department/division and staff member can understand their contribution and align their work to support the strategy.
- *Build Implementation Partnerships with the Community* - City elected leaders and staff should take this strategy out into the business community and neighborhoods. They should engage key economic development partners and clarify how to move forward together on the strategic goals.
- *Track Performance and Progress* – on a regular basis (every 12 months) the City Council should conduct a review of the strategy. The City should track three kinds of measures related to implementation of the strategy: performance on desired economic outcomes, performance on community success factors, and milestones and results of implementing the Economic Strategy.

As we implement this Strategy over the next three years, we need to be aware that economic conditions and variables will continue to change. The strategy was developed at a time of significant economic flux and uncertainty. Even as we focus on implementing initial priorities, we will need to be opportunistic as new possibilities and problems emerge over time. We must continue learning from each other locally and from our increasingly interconnected world.

Implementation Principles

City leaders and employees should consider how their work affects Greenville's economic development success and identify how they can contribute to implementing this Strategy.

On a day-to-day basis, the following principles are important:

- Economic development is a **citywide business**.
- Economic development and quality of life are **interdependent priorities**.
- **Employers are customers**, just like residents.
- Every City staff member is an **Economic Developer**.
- Be **responsive, adaptable, speedy, and aggressive**.
- **Be in communication** with Greenville employers for ongoing learning.
- Look out for **new opportunities that emerge** aligned with Greenville's Economic Vision.
- Engage the community and civic leaders to become **ambassadors for the economic development program**, realizing that all players are of vital importance to its success.

Action Items

#1 Attract and retain jobs by reaching out to companies in targeted economic sectors; complement efforts of economic development partners by focusing on business operations that wish to locate in close proximity to a university or medical campus, at a downtown location, or along a major commercial corridor

For Greenville to become a top-tier southern uni-med marketplace, it must attract and sustain a growing concentration of “driving industry”¹ companies that can serve as economic engines of the city and regional economy, while also building on its successful track record of encouraging broad-based economic development that generates jobs for the entire community.

Greenville will work with its economic development partners to attract companies that prefer an urbanized location, either because they are attracted to the Greenville commercial market, or because they prefer to be close to the city’s uni-med cluster of medical offices, research labs, information-intensive and financial services, and public institutions. These companies – whether they are start-ups or growing companies – typically have many choices about where to locate and/or expand their operations. The City of Greenville will support and/or incentivize projects that contribute to the local tax base and the development of the uni-med marketplace.

In the short-term, the Greenville-Pitt County sub-region has an opportunity to build on its existing advantages in certain Key Industry Clusters²: Research, higher education, medical; financial services & insurance, pharmaceuticals. Developing these technology-intensive clusters in conjunction with other complementary business sectors will spur the uni-med marketplace. In addition, the East Carolina University Office of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development identified eight targeted industry clusters in the areas of Advanced Learning Technologies, Health, Health Care and Medical Innovation; Marine Sciences; Bio Agriculture; Aerospace, Renewable Energy; Tourism and the Military.³

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Contract with site location firm to complete SWOT analysis of existing and emerging clusters within the Greenville/Pitt County area and to assess the City's organizational readiness to pursue ED (economic development) initiatives.
- Develop action plan for capitalizing on opportunities, and addressing potential issues, indicated by the SWOT analysis of Greenville/Pitt County-area clusters.
- Create a target list of 5-10 firms that do business in Greenville and which might be good fits for expansion in the Greenville/ENC market

¹ “Driving industry” refers not just to basic (or primary) economic activities, which tend to make more direct use of natural or physical resources and produce goods & services primarily for export (for regions, states, nations outside of the local market area), but also non-basic yet catalytic retail, services, entertainment magnets that can be just as important to vibrant urban economies as traditional “basic industries.”

² See: Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, *A Vision Plan for North Carolina’s Eastern Region* (May 2006), Figure 5, page 16.

³ East Carolina Office of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development, document (name, citation info?), page 2.

- Recruit new industries to the Greenville/Pitt County-area (CC goal) in concert with our ED partners.
- Collaborate with partners that perform ED planning and analyses to develop strategies for reaching out to, and attracting, firms in targeted sectors; seek input from fellow ED practitioners.
- Study options for developing an ED incentives toolkit; seek input from ED partners concerning what elements might best attract firms, talent and complement shared ED missions

#2 Develop retail to full potential, maximizing revenue impact

Retail has thrived in Greenville in part because the city has a strong “gravitational pull” on surrounding communities. Greenville has good gravity in the geographical sense: residents of eastern North Carolina are within reasonable driving distance of specialized retail, entertainment, and cultural offerings in larger metropolitan areas like Raleigh/Chapel Hill/Durham, Norfolk, and Wilmington; however, these places are far enough away that consumers often find it more convenient to shop in Greenville on a weekly or monthly basis.

Greenville will continue to capitalize on its regional advantages but will redouble its efforts to add a full range of retail shopping amenities, including currently under-provided retail niches that are likely to be supported by Greenville’s consumer base, yet do not require a very large concentration of upper-income households within a certain radius. Developing Greenville’s retail to its full potential is critically important for improving quality of life and increasing the City government’s tax base.

In particular, Greenville will recruit and retain retail and mixed-use development in the Center City and the Vidant Health campus area; Greenville will also encourage redevelopment and/or upgrading of outdated community or regional shopping centers, especially projects that enhance pedestrian and multimodal access and include mixed-uses, and which promote any applicable commercial corridor guidelines that the City develops in the future.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Identify strategies for increasing retail activity north of Tar River, including creating an ED Zone (CC goal); explore options for creating additional economic investment zones (CC).
- Present to City Council detailed plan on how to increase retail activity north of the Tar River in Economic Development Zone.
- Conduct detailed retail market analysis of Greenville-area market data to identify potential retail growth sectors; create list of under-served retail niches within the Greenville/Pitt County market area.
- Market to retail developers, major retailers, brokers, location specialists through appropriate targeted media sources.

#3 Nurture the success of local small businesses

Greenville’s small business and mid-sized businesses together employ up to a third of the local workforce. Some of these businesses aim to grow significantly in size, while many intend to remain smaller – providing an income stream to owners, offering job opportunities for residents,

and contributing to the fabric of the Greenville community. During economic upheaval, even more people are interested in self-employment or starting a new business.

Under the leadership of the Economic Development Division, the City of Greenville will embark on a more comprehensive effort to encourage and retain small businesses.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Consider the creation of targeted Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) programs in economic investment zone(s).
- Present to City Council detailed business and financial plans to create a small business incubator in West Greenville (CC goal)
- Study options for creating an arts incubator in the Uptown District.
- Support business opportunities for new and/or small companies (CC goal).
- Study the costs and benefits of Greenville pursuing recognition as a certified entrepreneurial community similar to several jurisdictions in western North Carolina.
- Partner with Chamber of Commerce to create Co-working Spaces (small business accelerator program).

#4 Increase Greenville's profile in regional and state forums, emphasizing that Greenville serves the eastern North Carolina region and is a rising uni-med marketplace

Greenville should enhance its credibility as a regional service provider while enhancing its national brand as a rising uni-med community. Greenville will cultivate stronger intra- and inter-regional relationships with other governments, institutions, and private industry players, advocating for improvements that will benefit all of eastern North Carolina. Some of those improvements will lead to projects that fit within the Greenville uni-med hub; other projects will locate elsewhere in the region but will still benefit Greenville indirectly.

Likewise, when Greenville distinctively brands itself as a top-tier uni-med community, and successfully markets that brand beyond the eastern North Carolina region, the resulting positive economic impacts will be felt throughout the region.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Complete branding study and marketing plan for Greenville (CC goal); the ED office will collaborate with other City departments and partner agencies to develop a brand for Greenville.
- Build intergovernmental relationships (CC goal); develop list of "peer communities"; seek to develop working relationships with peer communities; consult with other state and regional ED offices.

#5 Diversify the City's tax base and revenue sources to increase the City's general revenue

In the process of becoming a top-tier southern uni-med marketplace, Greenville's strategic economic goals will expand and diversify the tax base to increase City revenues, which in turn will reduce the tax burden on Greenville's citizens.

Specifically, in addition to recruiting and retaining higher paying driving industry jobs, Greenville will promote mixed-use and focused development that has the potential to create vibrant life-style clusters that generate a diversity of taxable economic activities.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Seek to attract a major mixed-use commercial development project, which might be incentivized if it is located within an economic incentive zone.
- Establish a menu of ED indicators for tax base diversification; track key indicators.

#6 Promote Greenville's proven track record as a business-friendly community; demonstrate how Greenville's streamlined, consistent, predictable development review process reduces business costs

Greenville already has a responsive, expeditious, and consistent planning, zoning, and development review process. Greenville-based real estate developers, construction and engineering firms, and business owners know that the City provides excellent customer service.

Greenville must do a better job, however, of promoting its track record as a business-friendly community to prospective investors who are less familiar with the local development climate. Specifically, Greenville must develop a user-friendly, interactive web-based platform that clearly explains the different steps of the local development process and why Greenville is such a great place in which to do business.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Contract with website management firm to create OED website/pages to support businesses, developers, ED partners, location specialists, professionals who interested in Greenville ED.
- Serve as liaisons to businesses looking to relocate or expand operations in Greenville, including referrals from PCDC, helping them to navigate the development review & local regulatory processes.

#7 Support area economic development partners in promoting manufacturing, biotech, gaming, military support, and other "heavy" industries

Greenville and Pitt County support the preservation and creation of production-related companies and jobs. Manufacturing, fabrication, and assembly remain an essential part of the high-tech innovation mix in Pitt County and eastern North Carolina. The development of robust "clean" energy, green manufacturing/industry, and clean-tech clusters has become a national priority and Greenville/Pitt County must be alert to new opportunities in these and related economic sectors.

Some production-intensive companies that are attracted to Pitt County will be better served by locating within the tax-exempt Industrial Park, rather than downtown or adjacent to the Vidant Health campus. The positive economic impacts from such investments will nonetheless reverberate in Greenville and throughout eastern North Carolina. The City's Economic Development Division will support the Pitt County Economic Development Commission's efforts to attract new industry to the Greenville metropolitan area.

At the same time, companies in production-related sectors like high-tech support and medical applications might prefer to locate in Center City Greenville, in the Medical District, or adjacent to the ECU main campus.

The global decline in manufacturing employment (due in part to continual productivity gains) has made the old days of “big game chasing” in economic development less effective; nevertheless, Greenville must be ready to jump on opportunities as they present themselves.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Promote inter-agency communication concerning our shared path for ED; strive to understand & complement partners' ED missions; partner with them on Entrepreneurial Initiative & Technology Transfer.
- Continue quarterly meetings of the Mayor's Economic Development Advisory Council.

#8 Improve transportation gateways and commercial corridors; make them more attractive, legible, and accessible

When shoppers, students, and business executives are introduced to Greenville, their first impressions are of the city's gateways and commercial corridors. Along with the ECU main campus and the Medical District, the city's commercial corridors represent the most important activity nodes in Greenville. By making the city's gateways and commercial corridors more dynamic and legible, Greenville will not only diversify its commercial mix; Greenville will become more of a destination community.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Continue activities associated with construction of the 10th Street connector (CC goal)
- Complete commercial corridor studies to include potential candidates such as Dickinson Ave and East 10th Street
- Complete Evans Street Gateway Project.
- Complete planning for West 5th Street Streetscape Project Phase-II.

#9 Develop sports, recreational, arts, cultural, and entertainment offerings

Greenville is implementing an ambitious program to integrate amateur sports and recreation for all ages with its growing community parks and greenways network. The city should also step up efforts to develop a more diverse portfolio of arts, cultural, and entertainment offerings. Greenville recognizes the links between community amenities, health, education, and long-term economic development. Indeed, enhancing these connections is essential to Greenville becoming a top-tier uni-med community.

The City is building these connections along two mutually-reinforcing fronts: making Greenville a health-enhancement community; and making Greenville a more vibrant university village.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Plan for the development of a performing arts center (CC goal)
- Implement the recommendations of the Town Common Master Plan to provide additional parking along the frontage of First Street as per Town Common Master Plan.
- Continue collaboration with theatre fundraising committee, which aims to support renovation of Uptown Theatre.
- Attract regional sporting events and tournaments to the Greenville area.
- Partner with Go Science organization to lease portion, or all, of City-owned building for operation of a science & educational center.
- Reinvest in public park facilities within the urban core; Dream Park project and improvements to Epps Recreation Center.
- Explore the opportunity to develop, present, and implement plans for expanding on existing recreational "campus" north of the Tar River.

#10 Position Center City area as the vibrant epicenter of Greenville's uni-med community; encourage mixed-use redevelopment and major "anchor" projects that reinforce the identities of downtown districts and adjacent neighborhoods

In the six years since the City approved *The Center City – West Greenville Revitalization Plan (2006)*, Greenville has completed numerous projects that have furthered the City's revitalization goals, which include: supporting the continued growth of the University, building new street connections, redeveloping historic neighborhoods, spurring new business opportunities; developing an arts and sciences district; providing greater and more diverse housing opportunities; and preserving Greenville's historically significant structures.

Quality redevelopment of the Center City and West Greenville that improves the visual and functional image of the city's commercial core districts and neighborhoods will enhance the community's overall economy and identity.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Address issues to change downtown Greenville (CC goal)
- Study the potential for providing free public wi-fi throughout downtown and other targeted areas, including the West Greenville Redevelopment Area (CC goal)
- Plan for the development of a downtown parking deck (CC goal).
- Plan for the development of a downtown hotel.
- Continue West Greenville revitalization activities as per the Center City - West Greenville Revitalization Plan.

#11 Support and promote the community's existing human-resources infrastructure: training; primary, secondary, and technical education; career support services

In pursuance of a long-term goal, all communities in eastern North Carolina have been taking concerted actions to prepare their residents to participate in the 21st century economy, improving the quality of K-12 education and training workers to succeed in the information-intensive economy.

In the short-term, Greenville – which serves the eastern NC region – should do a better job of promoting the wealth of human-resources infrastructure that is already in place.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Serve as a "clearinghouse" for directing prospective entrepreneurs and young workers to the appropriate agency
- Evaluate local and regional workforce resources by participating in local Work Ready Committee.
- Consider potential for providing additional workforce development programming at the West Greenville Intergenerational Center.

#12 Build 21st century infrastructure that serves industry needs, attracts active and creative professionals, and improves mobility and accessibility for all Greenville citizens

A city's physical infrastructure (transportation, communications, utilities, etc.) is one of its most vital strategic assets. To become a top-tier uni-med community, Greenville must strategically prioritize its public investments in infrastructure – whether building new systems, upgrading existing infrastructure, or maintaining its resources.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Greenway west to hospital (CC goal)
- Study locations for Intermodal Transportation Center (CC goal)
- Address infrastructure, including fiber optics, water/sewer, public wi-fi (CC goal)
- Explore the option of providing airline flights to at least one additional hub.
- Review opportunities for providing bus service from Greenville to Amtrak station in Wilson or Rocky Mount.

#13 Foster a proactive culture within the City government that anticipates needs and trends, cultivates new ideas, pursues innovation, and constantly seeks new ways to promote the City's strategic and long-range goals

Greenville will foster a more proactive organizational culture in part by focusing all city employees on the community's vision, strategic goals, and main objectives – What kind of community are we going to be? What do we want to achieve and why is it important? What is the purpose of the City's economic development programs? Every city employee is an economic developer.

It is not enough that people believe in that vision, however. To foster a proactive culture within City government, the leaders of the organization must encourage the creation of creative hives of discussion that realizes and supports the concept of strategic risk-taking and idea-exchange within and across the departments and divisions.

Actions to Achieve This Goal

- Engage the City's constituents & stakeholders in dialogues concerning ED priorities; invite national economic development leaders to Greenville for talks and workshops.
- Attend innovation & "best practices" forums annually (e.g., Emerging Issues Forum); bring back ideas for internal discussions, encouraging City depts. & divisions to implement new organizational strategies.
- Enroll at least one City executive per year in Leadership North Carolina program.